

Message Text

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PAGE 01 VIENTI 01024 130636Z

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 /026 W

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R 130507Z FEB 75

FM AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2503

S E C R E T VIENTIANE 1024

EXDIS

DEPT PASS CINCPAC AND SECDEF

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MCAP, MASS, PGOV, LA

SUBJECT: TALK WITH DEFENSE MINISTER SISOUK NA CHAMPASSAK

1. TO OUR ASTONISHMENT, DEFMIN SISOUK AND FINMIN NGON SANANIKONE WERE IN LUANG PRABANG ON 10 AND 11 FEBRUARY FOR TALKS WITH THE PRIME MINISTER. GENERAL ROUND AND I MET WITH SISOUK THIS MORNING AND ALTHOUGH HE WAS HURRIED AND UNCOMMUNICATIVE, WE GAINED THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION.

2. SISOUK SAID THE PRIME MINISTER WAS NOT A BIT STUBBORN OR UNREASONABLE WITH REGARD TO THE SUBSIDY OF 50 MILLION KIP A MONTH WHICH HE HAS DIRECTED BE GIVEN TO THE PATHET LAO. THE PRIME MINISTER UNDERSTOOD SISOUK'S CONCERN REGARDING THE PROBABLE RAMIFICATIONS OF THIS ACTION AND TOLD SISOUK AND NGON THAT THE SUM COULD BE DIMINISHED AS THEY SAW FIT IN ORDER TO BRING ABOUT PARITY BETWEEN FAR AND PL SALARIES. SISOUK SAID THAT HE SUBSEQUENTLY FOUND OUT FROM NGON THAT THE LATTER HAD ALREADY TRANSMITTED 50 MILLION KIP TO THE PATHET LAO AND HE SAID THAT HE WAS FURIOUS WITH NGON, WHOM HE CHARACTERIZED AS STUPID AND LAZY. ALTHOUGH THE PRIME MINISTER'S REVISED POSITION GIVES HOPE FOR FINDING SOME SOLUTION TO THIS PROBLEM, THE FACT THAT NGON HAS ALREADY MADE THE FIRST PAYMENT MAKES IT HARD FOR THE VIENTIANE SIDE TO NEGOTIATE A NEW ARRANGEMENT.

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SISOUK SEEMED AT LOSS AT HOW BEST TO PROCEED.

3. ON THE SUBJECT OF RISING THE COST OF POL TO LAO CONSUMERS AND MAINTAINING THE EXISTING TAX STRUCTURE, THE PRIME MINISTER WAS ALSO VERY FORTHCOMING. HE AGREED WITH SISOUK AND NGON THAT THE GOVERNMENT COULD NOT ACCEPT THIS LOSS OF REVENUE AND AUTHORIZED THEM TO PROCEED WITH RAISING THE POL PRICE.

4. COMMENT: ALTHOUGH WE DID NOT ALLUDE TO OUR INNUMERABLE SUGGESTIONS THAT THE VIENTIANE SIDE MAKE AN EFFORT TO STAY IN TOUCH WITH THE PRIME MINISTER, THIS EPISODE CONFIRMS OUR VIEW THAT THE LATTER WILL ACT RESPONSIBLY PROVIDED ALL ASPECTS OF A PROBLEM ARE BROUGHT TO HIS ATTENTION. SISOUK INFORMED US THAT THE PRIME MINISTER WILL BE RETURNING TO VIENTIANE FEBRUARY 20 SO THIS LACK OF COORDINATION BETWEEN THE VIENTIANE SIDE WITH HIM WILL OBVIOUSLY BECOME A THING OF THE PAST.
WHITEHOUSE

NOTE BY OC/T: NOT PASSED ABOVE ADDRESSEES.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: COALITION GOVERNMENT, SUBSIDIES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 13 FEB 1975
Decaption Date: 28 MAY 2004
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975VIENTI01024
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750052-0149
From: VIENTIANE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750244/aaaabnge.tel
Line Count: 81
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION SS
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 18 JUL 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <18 JUL 2003 by CunninFX>; APPROVED <22 JUL 2003 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
05 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: TALK WITH DEFENSE MINISTER SISOUK NA CHAMPASSAK
TAGS: MCPA, MASS, PGOV, LA, PATHET LAO
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006